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NORMAL SCHOOL TRAINING FOR THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS¹

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The majority of our normal schools offer academic as well as professional training. In most cases these academic courses are intended to supply deficiencies in the earlier education of the student. They are most conspicuous in catalogues of schools located in districts whose young people have not easy access to good high schools; and they are omitted in a very few schools where the proper secondary training may reasonably be demanded on entrance. These academic courses in English have no place in our discussion. They are essentially parallel to those in the ordinary high school; many of the yearbooks mention emphasis on the college-entrance requirements. Occasionally, however, a "pedagogical squint" is given in the normal school to even these secondary studies; for example: "The grammar work is a review of the first two terms, with the emphasis placed upon the teaching of this subject" (Spearfish, S.D.).

Academic courses are offered, too, in normal colleges whose curricula lead to a Bachelor's degree. These are equivalent to the culture courses in any ordinary college, and prepare for teaching in the high school. These courses, also, have no bearing on our discussion.

The normal school proper offers commonly two (rarely three) years of professional training to those who have completed the secondary school. Even here we find some academic courses in English; for, speaking frankly among ourselves, *sotto voce*, we may confess that for some graduates of even accredited high schools a little further training in composition and in the exact interpretation of literature is not amiss. Some of the catalogues state that

¹A paper read before the Normal School Section of the National Council of Teachers of English, Chicago, November 29, 1912. The writer examined eighty-five normal school catalogues.

students conspicuous for inability to use the mother-tongue correctly in speech or writing must take as many courses in English as are found necessary to give them the proper training—an indication that the schools are beginning to realize the importance of the example set by the teacher before the children. But we may ignore these courses intended for the personal culture of the student, for they are really of secondary grade. The data we specially require this afternoon are found in the *method* courses arranged for this same class of students.

Most of the normals offer some method course—grammar, composition, or literature. Many of them offer two, some even three, courses. Only a few of the catalogues I had access to mention the use of a textbook as a basis for such a course. The chief books I found named are: Chubb, *Teaching of English*; Carpenter, Baker, and Scott; McMurry's books on special method; McClintock, *Literature in the Elementary Schools*; Lyman, *Story Telling*; and Colby, *Literature and Life in School*. In some other cases the nature of the work described would lead one to suppose that some such textbook must be in the hands of the students.

Nearly all schools offer some work in methods in English grammar. Frequently it is only a part of a term's work, following a review of the subject-matter. If I may judge, as we all must in a measure do, from conditions in the school I know best, I should venture the opinion that, after the teacher has made reasonably sure that his students have a speaking acquaintance with grammatical science, little time is left for method. However, the year-books express a hope that some hours may be saved for method study. Sometimes a brief history of grammar teaching is named as a topic in this partial course. In many schools various theories of presenting lessons are studied, and written plans for typical recitations are required; or the students observe in the training department the application of principles and theories. Occasionally the method study is based on an examination of many texts. Frequently even these partial courses deal also with the teaching of language in the lower grades, and such a term's work appears to be very full and heavy.

When an entire term is set apart for grammar method, language

method is usually put into the same course, the grammar class of the upper grades being regarded as the legitimate successor of the language class of the lower grades. I quote a specimen description of such a course from the yearbook of the State Normal School at Cortland, N.Y.:

Methods of grammar.—The general aim of this course is to prepare the student to present clearly the simple grammatical facts needed in the elementary schools. At the outset the student's knowledge of grammar is tested by examination. Proper orientation of the subject of methods is secured (1) by a brief survey of the history of English grammar and (2) by a careful study (a) of the modification of the point of view in teaching grammar, and (b) of the changes in textbooks and methods herein involved. The class then reviews the language work of the primary grades from the standpoint of the basis thus furnished to later work in grammar. Courses of study suited to intermediate grades are next carefully mapped out. A general study of the inductive process is followed by special lessons on parts of speech and their modifications, the sentence and its parts. Work to be accomplished by the deductive process, viz., application and drill, receives special attention together with analysis of sentences. Such practical questions as written work, tests, and material to be used in teaching different topics are studied as opportunity is presented.

The "Teachers' Course in English Grammar" at the Montana State Normal College appears to work out a practical application of grammatical principles to sentence structure that all composition teachers must have long recognized as the best solution of one of their troublesome problems. The grammar class is certainly the safest, surest, and most economical place to correct errors in the construction of sentences. I quote:

It is the constant endeavor of the instructor to demonstrate that the body of grammatical knowledge is but the scientific classification of the materials used in the construction of sentences, and as such bears an essential relation to the subjects of composition and literature necessary for a teacher of language to appreciate. The grammatical analysis of essays or short stories from the best contemporary or recent writers is required, not as a mere drill in the recognition of grammatical constructions, nor for facility in dissection, but as an investigation of the way sentences are made by master-workmen. Daily written exercises to illustrate grammatical principles afford opportunity for practice in the rhetorical elements of sentence structure, unity, coherence, and emphasis, and furnish a logical occasion to teach the slighted subject of punctuation. All such sentence-writing is based on assigned reading, so that the course in grammar is at the same time a course in reading for teachers of literature in the elementary school.

Some courses are devoted exclusively to lower-grade language. Here is a *pot pourri* of the topics discussed in most of them: value of reproduction of rhymes, games, stories, poems; picture study that exercises the imagination as to the situation depicted, as to what went before or came after, or sometimes calls for simple description only; methods that induce reports of personal experience and so secure original composition; preparation of special day exercises (Wisconsin); the relation of language and thought; verbal memory in children's work; influences corrective of bad habits of speech (Macomb, Ill.); conversation exercises, with special attention to correct forms of speech, enlargement of vocabulary, and choice of words; dictation lessons; study and imitation of models; action games; criticism and correction of written work; correlation of language with other subjects; examination of available textbooks for the grades; the reading of professional and pedagogical works on the subject (Montclair, N.J.). Some of the catalogues mention special training for the teaching of oral composition, but surprisingly few, considering the importance of this work in the grades.

Besides the method courses in grammar and language, in which the work is naturally of an intensive character, an increasing number of schools are offering an extensive course treating of literature available for use in the grades. Sometimes two courses of this sort are offered, one for those preparing to teach in the lower grades, one for those preparing to teach in the upper grades; in other cases a single term is divided between the two classes. Two descriptions of such courses I should like to quote. The first is from the yearbook of the Normal College at Ypsilanti, Mich., the second from that of the Northern Illinois State Normal School.

"A course of (a) lectures on such types of literature as ballads, hero-tales and romances, fables, folk-tales, fairy stories and realistic stories; (b) lectures, readings, and discussions on the natural activities and interests of children during these various stages of development and the extent to which these interests should be allowed to serve as determining factors in the selection and presentation of grade literature; (c) reading and discussion of considerable material all the way from fairy stories and the rhymes of Mother Goose to the poems of Homer and the plays of Shakespeare. In this part of the course some time is devoted to practice in story telling and the oral reading of simple poems."

"A study of the various forms of literature that meets the interests of children, with reference especially to the educative ends desired from the

literature in the school. This means a study of the principles involved in the selection of material for class study and for outside reading, in the general arrangement of the course in literature, and in its relation to the other work of the school. It includes a study of rhymes and jingles and other child verse, the accumulative story, the fairy tale and other forms of the folk-tale, nonsense literature, the fable and other forms of animal story, stories of myths, Bible stories, ballad literature, and the great stories of adventure and heroism."

The following composite picture, showing features of a dozen descriptions from various catalogues, gives an idea of the scope of such a course in other schools: emphasis on the study of the individual story, particularly its structure and suitability for dramatization; bibliographies of material suitable for use in the primary grades; model study of classics used in the grades; study of reading-books to determine the literary quality of the matter in them and their adaptation to the various grades; discussion as to the use of questioning, dramatization, and impersonation; development of courses in literature for elementary schools; lesson plans written and discussed; the school library; the public library; ways of teaching memory gems; the study of American authors with special reference to the use of their works in the grades; reading of pedagogical texts. Emphasis is sometimes placed on training in story-telling, especially for lower-grade teachers. Methods in language and composition are sometimes, very reasonably, combined with this course instead of with grammar. *Literature in the grades* often correlates closely with *Teachers' Reading*, which then includes, besides the technique of pronunciation and expression, some discussion of material to be read both in and out of school.

Instead of these more specialized courses in the various divisions of the material of the English department, some normal schools give "omnibus courses," dealing with all the material in one term. We may imagine the zeal and industry required to compress so much into a few weeks.

This course is given entirely to methods, or how to teach the various subjects that fall under the head of English, such as the story, the language lesson, and reading, in the primary grades, and literature in the upper grades. Methods in dramatization, in composition and in theme-writing are studied, and considerable time is given to a thorough review of grammar and the best method of teaching the subject in the grades (Spearfish, S.D.).

The course in English Method considers oral language work, literature, composition, and grammar. After an introductory discussion of the nature of language, its development in the child, and his language possession when he enters school, a study is made of the means of gaining fluency and correctness of speech—the conversation lesson, the reproduction of the story, drills and games, and language teaching. The work on written composition includes the four forms of composition and the technic to be developed with each, letter-writing, the mechanics of composition, and the use of models and the correction of themes. The discussion of grammar includes the following subjects: the history of the teaching of English grammar as an explanation of its Latinization; the purpose in teaching the grammar of the mother-tongue; a plan for grades seven and eight; terminology; the relative value of analysis, diagrams, parsing; and lesson plans for some of the most difficult topics (Providence, R.I.).

A number of catalogues mention a most gratifying co-operation of the teachers of classes in the normal proper with the critics in the training school, a condition that secures to the students both the study of theory and also observation in practice. Too rarely the yearbooks mention the co-operation of other departments with the English department in an effort to confirm correct habits of speech and writing in the student teachers.

On the whole, I put away the file of eighty catalogues feeling that the present situation is more promising than I had dared to expect. There is plainly a rising standard in normal schools for both academic and professional preparation, and a sincere effort to help their students secure some measure of culture. We are certainly growing away from the old notion that *anybody*, prepared or unprepared, can teach English, and we are seriously attempting to acquaint the young teacher with the material she can most profitably use and with what we know about the best ways of training children to a proper use of language and of inspiring in them a love of good literature.

I have tried to state briefly what is; the question we have now to consider is: "Is what is, right?" Or can we do better? Can we set a higher mark for our own work in the shape of better, broader, more practical, more inspiring courses of study?